DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 126 TM 840 407

AUTHOR Menges, Robert J.
TITLE Performance Evaluation of Women and Minority Faculty at a Research University.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (68th, New Orleans, LA, April 23-27, 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Evaluation Criteria; *Evaluation Methods; *Faculty Evaluation; Higher Education; Interprofessional Relationship; Interviews; *Minority Group Teachers; *Women Faculty

ABSTRACT

An optimal evaluation system should have five features if it is to both stimulate academic work and lead to fair decisions: clear expectations, feedback on performance, formative evaluation, summative evaluation, and differential rewards. Women and minorities were asked about their experiences in relation to these features. None had received anything they regarded as a job description; they suspected that the skill with which they figured out what they were supposed to do was one criterion on which they would be evaluated. These faculty drew conclusions about how well they were doing from internalized personal standards, from institutional information, and from feedback in the wider scholarly community. All informants described themselves as relatively distant from the social circles of their white male colleagues, but they disagreed strongly about the consequences of that distance on their careers. None of the respondents felt they were being rewarded disproportionately because of their race or sex. They felt the equal of, or better than, their white male colleagues, but several said they received fewer rewards and incentives than their colleagues received or deserved. Based on this study, university performance evaluation procedures are not optimal. (BW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. J. Menges

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED246126

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF WOMEN AND MINORITY FACULTY AT A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY[1]

Robert J. Menges

Northwestern University

In 1902, Freud wrote to a medical colleague, "One must look somewhere for one's salvation, and the salvation I chose was the title of professor" (quoted in Schorske, 1980). As an outsider to the academic establishment, Freud badly wanted university recognition. He felt his work deserved recognition, but he also felt guilty when he sought the support of those with power. By cultivating them, he legitimized their questionable power still further.

I will not push the parallel between Freud and present-day women and minority faculty too far, but there are several important similarities. They include his minority status as a Jew, the unconventional nature of his work, and his feelings of guilt. Most pertinent to this paper, however, is his perception that access to a professorship was controlled by an elite, that is, by those who already had one, and that their judgements were made according to ambiguous and subjective criteria.

Is that a fair characterization of the experience of women and minority faculty in research oriented universities? I shall return to that question. First I will describe features of a performance evaluation system which would avoid some of these problems and then report what our women and minority faculty informants said about their evaluation-related experiences.

[1]Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April, 1984.

TM 840 407

Effective Performance Evaluation

Performance review should not only yield even-handed decisions about rewards and advancement in the organization but it should also help employees diagnose and improve their performance. The extensive literature on performance evaluation (see, for example, Kane & Lawler, 1979; Lathan and Wesley, 1981; Morrison & Kranz, 1981) suggests to me five features which the optimal evaluation system should have if it is both to stimulate academic work and to lead to fair decisions.

1. Clear expectations. In some organizations, expectations are codified in job descriptions. Although job descriptions imply uniformity which is distasteful to academics, they do have the significant virtue of clarity. Faculty should know what they are to do and what impact they are to have both locally and in wider academic arenas. This includes information about the domains of expected work and about prevailing standards of quality and quantity. Particulars will vary; after all, no two professorships are identical. But ambiguity should be minimal.

2. Feedback on performance. Information about the professor's teaching, scholarship, and service should be regularly available. The organization's obligations include providing some such information directly and providing resources through which the professor can generate additional information, primarily for self-assessment.

3. Formative evaluation. Performance feedback should permit diagnosis and improvement of work well in advance of promotion and tenure reviews. Such help may be provided by mentors, by teaching consultants, and by others, some of whom are not involved in promotion and tenure decisions.

4. Summative evaluation. Final decisions should be based on extensive documentation of performance, documentation which is considered in context. What is the candidate's standing in his or her field? What are the candidate's peculiar contributions to the institution? What are the candidate's own intentions with regard to scholarship and teaching? How does the candidate interpret the evidence gathered from others? Put another way, the review should consider both the worth of the candidate's work in a particular institutional setting and the merit of the candidate's work in the wider academic world.

5. Differential rewards. Stated succinctly, the level of reward should correspond to the level of performance, and that correspondence should be discernible to faculty.

My impression is that these features are not common in academic organizations. But let us turn to our women and minority informants and ask how they learned what they are supposed to do, how they assess how well they are doing, and how they are rewarded. (For details of methodology and for further findings, see Exum, Menges, Watkins, and Berglund, 1984.)

What Am I Expected To Do?

None of our informants had received anything they regarded as a job description. Apart from specific teaching assignments, they were left largely on their own to determine what was expected. They suspected that the skill with which they figured out what they were supposed to do was one criterion on which they would be evaluated, much as students' success often depends on how well they figure out what the professor expects them to learn. One woman described the situation as "working within a system

of secret rules which you will eventually know by word of mouth." Since they felt that asking these questions of senior faculty directly is unacceptable, they looked for clues where they could, as the person who attended departmental meetings about job searches in order to see from the way in which potential candidates were discussed what senior colleagues might expect from her.

Other clues came from the report of professional activities which faculty compile each year. The categories on that form were a revelation of expectations, but unfortunately a revelation which did not come until near the end of the year.

The dean or the department head is another source of clues, as for the young black scholar who was told quite pointedly by the dean that he should finish his research rather than concentrate on other activities. Such interviews with supervisors, if they are to be useful, must be regularized and fair, that is, they must transcend idiosyncrasies of personal relationships with individual faculty.

How Well Am I Doing?

These faculty drew conclusions about how well they were doing from internalized personal standards, from institutional information, and from feedback in the wider scholarly community.

1. Internalized personal standards. It is not surprising that professionals who prize autonomy as much as academics do should find personal standards important. However, such standards are by definition subjective, and there is little sharing of these private criteria with others.

Personal standards cannot be compared with departmental and university criteria since the latter are ambiguous. For one informant,

university standards are less clear than when she was "in cut-throat competition in the private and federal agencies." Nor can professional standards be compared with those which prevail in the academic specialty, if that specialty is one, like black and feminist studies, where definitions of good work lack the concensual validity and stability presumed in traditional fields. Even when internalized standards lack external validation, faculty continue to regard them with considerable importance.

2. Institutional information. Compared with other organizations, university evaluation procedures are infrequent and unsystematic. According to our respondents, there are no formal evaluation or feedback systems before the third and then the sixth year reviews. And so, faculty turn to fragmentary or less formal indicators. These include student course evaluations, comments and letters, student products (especially the research and theses of graduate students), comments and opinions of colleagues and departmental chairs, and particular service assignments such as appointment or election to certain faculty or university committees.

Of course, faculty do not know how such information will be weighed in formal reviews. They may assume, for example, that more regularized evidence, such as student evaluations of teaching, will be weighed more heavily, but that is hardly likely at research universities. This ambiguity is acute for those women and minority faculty who are not part of the informal social networks where peer opinion is gathered. (Further evaluation issues at the institution level are discussed by Menges and Exum, 1983.)

3. External information. Indicators external to the university include invitations to conferences, papers presented at professional meetings, published articles and books, consulting, book reviews, and national or international peer opinion. All of our respondents emphasized these indicators. External information is important partly because it influences their own self-evaluation and the university's evaluation of them.

By relying on external information, the employing institution in part abdicates its evaluative function to the invisible college of the profession. Women and minority faculty working in developing fields have their work judged by colleagues in those fields who are at other institutions; their work may not be well known at the home campus even after they have been there for several years. Some information from external sources is desirable and practical for major reviews, but it serves faculty poorly in year-to-year salary decisions.

The Importance of Being Liked

When expectations are ambiguous, there is room for personal qualities, such as "likableness," to influence promotion and tenure decisions. All of our black and female informants described themselves as relatively distant from the social circles of their white males colleagues, but they disagreed strongly about the consequences of that distance on their careers. A recently-tenured black woman, for example, stated that her own "disinterest in the personal lives" of colleagues and her insistence on finding friends outside the university had made no difference at all to her career. An untenured black woman created her own conscious policy of distance. "No one knows me," she said, "I have mystified myself."

Those in the middle ranks were likely to be ambivalent. A black male, up for tenure at the time of the interview, stated that he had little time for "those things--cocktails, teas, informal networks," but acknowledged that "I get pangs of guilt...because, like any other institution, they expect it if you want to stay around." Older or more experienced faculty were more likely to describe the adverse consequences of social distance. A senior white woman said she didn't do a lot of socializing because "I don't have to," but added, "It is helpful if the dean likes you...some member of the administration has to take you under their wing." As a senior black male put it, "It is important to be liked and probably at a much deeper level than we are aware of."

So, is being liked important? Our definitive answer can only be "probably."

For What Am I Rewarded?

Contrary to what is assumed by those who see affirmative action as reverse discrimination against white males, none of our respondents felt they were being rewarded disproprtionately because of their race or sex. They felt the equal of, or better than, their white male colleagues, but several said they received fewer rewards and incentives than their colleagues received or deserved.

Our informants perceived the universities' tangible rewards, such as salary increments and leaves, as essentially unrelated to their own productivity. Even a positive tenure decision, by definition an indicator of productivity, did not necessarily lead to significant salary increases. Institutional use of such rewards was seen as inconsistent and unsystematic. Further deprivation of incentives and rewards occurs for

those women and minorities who are excluded from the interpersonal networks which academics find stimulating and sustaining.

Conclusion

University performance evaluation procedures do not fare well according to reports of these women and minority faculty, particularly in light of the desirable features of performance evaluation systems which were mentioned earlier in this paper.

If we now reconsider Freud's strategy of cultivating the powerful, what might we conclude? Despite the guilt which it may produce, that strategy remains good advice for those who seek their salvation in the title of professor.

References

Exum, W. H., Menges, R. J., Watkins, B., & Berglund, P. (1984). Making it at the top: Women and minority faculty in the academic labor market. American Behaviorial Scientist, 27, 301-324.

Kane, J. S., & Lawler, E. E. III (1981). Performance appraisal effectiveness: Its assessment and determinants. Research in Organizational Behavior, 1, 425-478.

Lathan, G. P., & Wesley, K. N. (1981). Increasing productivity through performance appraisal. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Morrison, A. M., & Kranz, M. E. (1981). The shape of performance appraisal in the coming decade. Personnel, 58, 12-22.

Menges, R. J., & Exum, W. H. (1983). Barriers to the progress of women and minority faculty. Journal of Higher Education, 54, 123-144.

Shorske, C. E. (1980). Fin-de-Siecle Vienna. New York: Knopf.